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# UNITED STATES-CUBAN PERSPECTIVES—1975

## Conversations on Major Issues With Cuban Officials

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REPORT OF A STUDY VISIT TO CUBA

SEPTEMBER 18–OCTOBER 15, 1975

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# FOREWORD

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS,
*Washington, D.C., May 4, 1976.*

This report was prepared by the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress in response to a request by Hon. Dante B. Fascell, Chairman of the Subcommittee on International Political and Military Affairs, and has been submitted to the Committee on International Relations.

The report, which summarizes the author's detailed discussions with Cuban officials of Cuban foreign policy, the U.S. trade embargo, Cuba's revolutionary ideology, relations with the Soviet Union and other major issues during a visit to Cuba from September 18 to October 15, 1975, may be of benefit to members of the committee in evaluating U.S. foreign policy with respect to Cuba. The report does not necessarily reflect the views of the membership of the Committee on International Relations.

THOMAS E. MORGAN, *Chairman.*

## LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS,
*Washington, D.C., May 4, 1976.*

Hon. THOMAS E. MORGAN,
*Chairman, Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Recent statements by President Ford and the Secretary of State indicate that Cuba's recent extensive military involvement in Africa has ended for the present any prospects for a significant improvement in relations between the United States and Cuba.

Last year the possibility of improved relations was widely discussed in Congress and a review of our longstanding policy toward Cuba was urged by many both in and out of Congress. While I have supported, and continue to support, our longstanding policy toward Cuba, originally formulated during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, I welcomed the opportunity for a thoughtful review of this aspect of U.S. policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean.

For a policy review of United States-Cuba relations to be as comprehensive as possible, it was necessary to know as much as possible about the rationale behind Cuban foreign policy. I was thus pleased to learn that the Congressional Research Service's Specialist in Latin American Affairs, Barry Sklar, had been invited last year to visit Cuba to gain firsthand impressions of Cuban policy. In behalf of the subcommittee I expressed to Mr. Sklar our interest in receiving a report on his conversations on major issues with Cuban officials. A copy of the report has now been submitted to the subcommittee and is enclosed for your attention.

Because of the continuing interest in Congress in Cuban policy and because this report contains an excellent summary of the perspectives of Cuban officials which are still of importance despite the recent sharpening of differences between the United States and Cuba, I believe that this report would be of interest and value to both members of the committee and the whole Congress.

The report does not necessarily reflect the views of the membership of the subcommittee.

Sincerely,

DANTE B. FASCELL,
*Chairman, Subcommittee on International Political and Military Affairs.*

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# CONTENTS


| | Page |
|---|---|
| Foreword | III |
| Letter of transmittal | V |
| Prologue | 1 |
| The setting | 2 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| Cuban thought on relations with the United States—An appraisal | 4 |
| The embargo | 6 |
| Cuban revolutionary principles and the issue of relations with the United States: A conceptual dilemma? | 7 |
| Trade | 9 |
| Other major issues | 11 |
| Cuba's relationship to the Soviet Union | 11 |
| Guantanamo | 12 |
| Claims and compensation | 12 |
| Political prisoners | 13 |
| Postscript | 13 |
| Appendix: Itinerary | 15 |

# UNITED STATES-CUBAN PERSPECTIVES—1975
## Conversations on Major Issues With Cuban Officials

(By Barry Sklar, Specialist in Latin American Affairs, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division)

### Prologue

I was invited to Cuba by the Ministry of Foreign Relations (MINREX), through the Cuban Mission to the United Nations, in my capacity as Specialist in Latin American Affairs for the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress. I viewed the prospect of a study visit to Cuba as an opportunity to informally talk to the Cubans about the issues which most concern Members of Congress regarding the normalization of relations with Cuba. Congressional aides, with whom I consulted, agreed that conversations with Cuban officials could serve to place the issues into better perspective for me as an analyst as well as for the Members of Congress whom I assist on the Cuban question. My conversations with the Cubans were very informal and, of course, unofficial. The Cubans understood that I represented only myself and not the U.S. Congress nor the U.S. Government.

What follows in these pages are my observations, perceptions, and reflections on the give and take sessions with the Cubans over the basic issues confronting the consideration of relations between the United States and Cuba. Painstaking effort has been made to accurately and objectively convey the substance of my conversations as well as relate Cuban thinking on the issues and their reactions and responses to my representation of the issues from the various points of view of the Congress. I believe that this report will prove helpful to Members of Congress because it illustrates that the points of contention involve much more than consideration of factual data. Understanding of Cuban thinking and developments within the context of the socialist system, under which Cuba has been functioning these many years, should aid future congressional consideration of the normalization of relations issue.

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My trip to Cuba was undertaken in a context completely at variance with the one which exists today between the United States and Cuba. Politically potent words such as Angola, the MPLA, Agostinho Neto, Zionism, CIA/Mafia/assassination, and the Florida primary, were not part of the United States-Cuba lexicon prior to September 1975. Today, these matters are an intricate part of the relationship between the two countries and have served to halt the process toward the normalization of relations and threaten to set the process back several years, if not destroy it altogether.



69-814—76——2

The public awareness of extensive Cuban military involvement in Angola and the Cuban activity on behalf of the resolution in the United Nations General Assembly equating Zionism with racism were not part of the setting from mid-September to mid-October 1975, the time frame of my visit, and therefore were not subjects of conversation. Nor was the public evidence that the CIA and the Mafia collaborated in bizarre assassination plots against Fidel Castro, and the positions of Presidential candidates in state primaries, factors in United States-Cuba relations at the time of my meetings with Cuban officials.

At this date, it is too early to assess the impact of the Cuban military intervention in Angola, and the reaction it has stimulated, on the long-term future of the consideration of the normalization of relations question. Much would seem to depend on what the Cubans do in the next several months with regard to the use of their forces in Africa as well as on the Ford administration's assessment of Cuban motivation for its involvement, and Cuban desire for relations with the United States. Analysis of this problem notwithstanding, the basic issues, long considered obstacles to relations, still remain, and are the subjects of this report.

## The Setting

The movement toward the reconciliation of differences between the United States and Cuba had been gathering momentum when I visited Cuba in September–October 1975. Since the beginning of the year, both nations had taken significant steps, which, along with statements made by President Ford, Secretary of State Kissinger, and Premier Castro, signaled a desire to end the 14 years of antagonistic, sometimes bitter, opposition. The major active negative issue between the two nations at this time was Cuba's intensification of its support, in the international arena, for Puerto Rican independence.

Several times during the first 9 months of the year, the U.S. Government announced the relaxation of certain provisions of the trade embargo on Cuba, the Department of State liberalized travel restrictions on Cuban diplomats at the United Nations, and the United States, in July, voted along with 15 Latin American nations to end the 11-year-old OAS diplomatic and economic sanctions against Cuba. In August, after a series of communications between Senator John Sparkman and Premier Castro, the Cuban Government returned to Southern Airways nearly $2 million in ransom money taken from hijackers of a plane in 1972. Earlier in the year, the Cuban Government returned three accused hijackers to the United States. Congressional interest in the relationship between the United States and Cuba was reflected by the visits to Cuba of Senator George McGovern, Senator James Abourezk, Representative Charles Whalen, and Representative Stephen Solarz.

The implied change of attitude of both governments toward each other was reenforced by the leadership of both countries. In a speech in Houston in March, Secretary Kissinger said, ". . . we are prepared to move in a new direction if Cuba will." In May, Premier Castro stated that he hoped for "friendship" with the United States and said, "One way or the other, we owe it to ourselves to live in peace." The following day, speaking for the Ford administration, White House

Press Secretary Ron Nessen said that the United States "sees no advantage in perpetual antagonism" with the Cuban Government.

## Introduction

This report is based on conversations with officials of the Cuban Government held during my visit to Cuba from September 18 to October 15, 1975. As I was assured, the conversations were marked by openness and frankness, and I was given the opportunity to probe the Cubans regarding their views on these particular issues. At the same time, the Cubans welcomed my reflection of the differing views held in the Congress on the normalization issue.

Substantive meetings were held with Isabel Hernandez Tapanes, Chief of the North American and Caribbean Section of the Ministry of Foreign Relations; Evelio Lastra Ramos, Chief of the North American Department of the Directorate for Western Europe and North America of the Ministry of Foreign Trade; Dr. Mario Ugidos, Justice of the Popular Tribunal (Cuba's Supreme Court); Alberto Betancourt, President of the Chamber of Commerce; Ramon Castro Ruz, older brother of Premier Fidel Castro, who is chief administrator of Las Valles de Picadura experimental farm; Mariano de la Red, member of the Executive Committee and Director for Foreign Affairs of the Poder Popular (Popular Power) [1] in Matanzas Province; the Director of Information for the Ministry of Education; Esteban Morales, dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Havana; and members of the study group on the United States at the University.

Perspectives on the Cuban political, economic, and social system, as well as important exchanges of philosophical views on the policies of the Governments of Cuba and the United States, were provided by and held with Mary Gentile and Pedro Llopis, from MINREX, who were my escorts throughout my stay. Ms. Gentile and Mr. Llopis were indefatigable in their efforts to ensure the success of my trip by helping me to keep up with the constantly changing and ambitious schedule, and were instrumental in enabling me to gain insights into certain aspects of Cuban life. Invaluable assistance was provided by Jose Delegado who served as a backup to my escorts and by Blaise Schenk, chargé d'affaires of the Embassy of Switzerland.

During periods when I was on my own, as well as when I was accompanied by my escorts, I had the opportunity to see the Cuba of the city of Havana and the Provinces of Havana and Matanzas. I saw the impressive low-cost Alamar housing project, just east of Havana, and the deterioration taking place in Old Havana; I saw the vibrant and bustling port of Havana, and the aging, once elegant homes of Miramar; I spoke to young enthusiastic dedicated government officials as well as ordinary citizens who praised the virtues of the system under which they live and work, and I spoke to some who found fault with the austere and politically restrictive ambience of Cuba today.

This brief but significant glimpse of present day Cuba provided me with the necessary backdrop for discussing the many issues involved in the question of normalization of relations between the two countries. Political scientists write of the linkage between internal develop-

[1] Poder Popular is a system of popular representation which was tried on an experimental basis in Matanzas Province and now will be extended to all provinces in Cuba.

ments in a country and that country's foreign policy and Cuba certainly is a case in point. It is not only necessary to see the material accomplishments of the Cuban Government, i.e., the new housing projects, the proliferation of schools and hospitals, and the thriving fishing port. It is also necessary to hear the people talk about themselves and reveal their perceptions on life in Cuba as well as their views of the world beyond Cuba. It was especially important to hear the Government officials' assessments of internal and external developments.

These factors in the aggregate, illustrated a Cuban philosophy and attitude that was articulated in my conversations with officials on the substantive issues. It provided me with an insight into Cuban thinking with regard to relations with the United States which I hope to convey in this report.

This report, based on my interpretation of conversations with Cuban officials, will be limited to those major issues in United States-Cuban relations which were discussed. An assessment of life and internal developments in Cuba cannot be made on the basis of a month-long trip (especially when 12 of those days were spent in a hospital in Matanzas due to an automobile accident), and that was not the purpose of my visit. However, the trip to Cuba has enabled a clearer perception of the intricacies of the relations issues which I will attempt to convey in this report and in further work for Congress on this important foreign policy question.

## Cuban Thought on Relations with the United States—An Appraisal

From conversations held during my month's stay in Cuba, I conclude that the Cuban Government definitely is interested in relations with the United States, but the normalization question is not the major concern, nor are relations considered an absolute necessity. It was repeated to me many times, and explicitly stated by Fidel Castro in his speech commemorating the 15th anniversary of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, that Cuba will not sacrifice its revolutionary principles for relations with the United States.

The Cubans seem to speak with a certain sense of self-assuredness when discussing the issue of normalizing relations with the United States. Fourteen years of doing without the United States has given the Cubans confidence that they can continue to do without it in the future if necessary. They seem to feel secure behind their relationship with the Soviet Union, the legitimacy that comes with being recognized by almost 100 nations of the world, including 11 from Latin America, the confidence which results from carrying on vigorous trade with the major industrial nations of the world, both East and West, and the pride they have in their accomplishments on the domestic level in the fields of health, education, and housing.

The issue was brought down (perhaps more appropriately raised up) to the human level by Ramon Castro,[2] during a long informal discussion at Valles de Picadura, when he spoke of the unnaturalness of the phenomenon of two countries, geographically so close, not dealing with

[2] Meeting at Valles de Picadura, Havana Province, Oct. 12, 1975.

one another. Fidel's older brother said that he viewed relations with the United States, not as nation to nation, but as people to people. He said that people need each other and should be available to help each other, for this is the primary reason why there should be relationships. Speaking from the perspective of a "simple farmer," as Ramon describes himself, he listed three criteria for relations with the United States: lifting of the embargo, return of the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo to Cuba, and mutual respect.

Ramon Castro may have been the only one to actually use the term mutual respect, but it certainly was implied, inferred, and conveyed by many. Cuban thought with regard to the United States goes back much earlier than the break in relations in 1961 or the success of the Revolution in 1959. It has its origins in the "Manifest Destiny" era of U.S. history of the mid-19th century and includes the memory of what many Cubans feel was U.S. interference in their struggles for independence from Spain, and the Platt amendment, which placed Cuba under virtual protectorate status of the United States.

The thinking of the "average" Cuban with respect to the United States presented a very interesting phenomenon. Cubans of all ages and at all levels of the social system can recite chapter and verse, the list of Cuban grievances against the United States. The effectiveness of the concentrated politicization of the Cuban masses, through the ambitious educational system, political billboards, the mass organizations such as the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution and the Union of Communist Youth, and the communications media, comes through very clearly in conversations. This combination of teaching in which the United States is cast in an unfavorable light, and the dissemination of information reenforcing the precept that the socialist system is far superior to the degenerate capitalist system now deteriorating in the United States, led me to expect that the Cubans would be very cool to me as a citizen of the United States as well as to the idea of relations with the United States and its people.

The phenomenon I witnessed, however, was one by which the Cubans very effectively were able to make a clear and separate distinction between the Government of the United States and its people. In my month of conversations, I heard no negative comment regarding the prospects of relations with the United States although there were comments made regarding what effect relations might have on Cuba by bringing in commercialism and other undesirable aspects of tourism.

I did expect warm and cordial treatment from my official hosts but I did not necessarily expect the same from the "unofficial" Cubans with whom I would come in contact—those who did not view me as an "official" visitor. From elevator operators in the hotel to waiters in the restaurants, school students and young soldiers, there was simply no sign of animosity or negative attitude toward me or toward the United States in general. Even the regular 2 a.m. "political fests" with politically keen Dr. Roberto Porto, my doctor and chief of orthopedics in the hospital in Matanzas, were held in an atmosphere of geniality and many times ended with the mutual jocular criticism of the others government and policies.

On the official level, the Cubans look for a new relationship with the United States. A relationship between equals who respect the

other's political and social system, who accept that they are ideologically different, who stand by their guiding principles. The Cubans feel that the United States will have to accept the fact that it is dealing with a revolutionary socialist government or forego the thought of relations with Cuba. In sum, the Cubans believe that relations with the United States is not worth sacrificing the ideals and principles established by the Revolution. Given this set of factors, it would seem that much would depend on Cuban articulation and interpretation, and U.S. assessment of these revolutionary principles, at the time of serious discussion and negotiation with the United States.

## The Embargo

From the Cuban perspective, the fact that the U.S. embargo on trade with Cuba is the most serious and dominant in the long list of issues with the United States was most certainly reinforced by the Cubans with whom I spoke. It is clear that the embargo (referred to by the Cubans as "el Bloqueo"—the Blockade), has had a deep psychological as well as political and economic impact on Cuba and its people.

It was one of the first subjects of conversation upon my arrival as Mary Gentile apologized for the drabness of the hotel room, the exposed electrical outlets, and the poor telephone service. Pedro Llopis, in many conversations, spoke of the hardships endured by the Cubans, especially in the early years before massive assistance from the Soviet Union. Blame was placed on the embargo by Roberto Beoto, one of my doctors in the hospital in Matanzas who was so angry that an important international journal of orthopaedic medicine, published in the United States, took 6 months to reach Cuba because of a circuitous mail route, that he woke me up at 3 a.m. one morning to get it off his chest. On the lighter side, was Dr. Beoto's response to me one night when I asked him why a large room, such as the one I was in with three other patients, had only a very dim light (it seemed to be about a 60-watt bulb). Beoto answered, "el Bloqueo" with a shrug of his shoulders, a gesture with his hands, and a slight smile. Of course, the embargo is blamed for many things beyond its sphere but its impact on Cuba's attitude and policy toward the United States is clear.

On the official level, the issue of the embargo was elevated to the dominant place superseding and affecting conversation on all other issues. It led the list of criteria discussed by Ramon Castro who said that the Cubans cannot sit around a negotiating table with the United States with their hands tied, as he folded his arms close to his chest for emphasis.

A brief discourse on the devastating effects of the embargo and its implications for present and future relations with the United States was presented by Evelio Lastra Ramos,[3] Chief of the North American Department of the Directorate for Western Europe and North America, of the Ministry of Foreign Trade, as an introduction to our very substantive conversation on the future prospects of United States-Cuba trade. The impact of the embargo on Cuban thinking toward

[3] Substantive conversations were held with Evelio Lastra Ramos at the Ministry of Foreign Trade, Sept. 24, 1975.

the future trade relationship with the United States was demonstrated when we discussed the types of products and commodities the Cubans would be most interested in importing from the United States. Lastra Ramos felt the Cubans would not want to import machinery which would be dependent on replacement parts from the United States, because they do not want to again find themselves in a difficult situation as a result of possible adverse actions by the United States. According to Lastra, they do not want to place themselves in a situation like the first few years of the embargo, when their economy suffered greatly because they could not get replacement parts for U.S. machinery. Replacement of the machinery with equipment from Eastern Europe was necessary.

Perhaps sensing that after nearly a month in Cuba, I had heard enough about the embargo, Isabel Hernandez Tapanes,[4] Chief of the North American and Caribbean Section of the Ministry of Foreign Relations, refrained from initiating discussion on the issue. She responded, however, to my question on the role the embargo played in Cuban thought toward relations with the United States. She revealed that the Cuban Government position on "no negotiation until the embargo was totally lifted" did not preclude substantive "conversation" and "discussion." She put forth the position that the Cubans would receive a "visitor" for "conversation" but not for "negotiation." It was very clear that the Cuban Government holds the U.S. embargo as an obstacle to official negotiation but not to informal discussion.

### Cuban Revolutionary Principles and the Issue of Relations With the United States: A Conceptual Dilemma?

The Cubans emphatically defend what is regarded as one of the major tenets of the Cuban Revolution—support of liberation movements throughout the world. Isabel Hernandez spoke of this in the context of what she perceived as Cuba's role in the new international system. She expressed the opinion that the world is changing and that the United States and Cuba have to recognize that change. Cuba's response to these developments, in the view of Ms. Hernandez, is to continue to support oppressed peoples and revolutionary movements. As if anticipating my next question, Ms. Hernandez glided into a discussion of Cuba and Puerto Rico.

Isabel Hernandez explained that Cuban interest in independence for Puerto Rico goes back 100 years. She stated that Puerto Ricans aided Cuba in its fight for independence and Cubans fought in Puerto Rico's struggle against Spain. She emphasized that Puerto Rico and Cuba have been closely associated over the years. The present Cuban Government's efforts on the part of Puerto Rican independence, according to Ms. Hernandez and other officials with whom I spoke, is an extension of its traditional interest in Puerto Rico and its implementation of a major revolutionary principle.

I, of course, spoke of Cuban involvement in the Puerto Rican independence movement in the context of relations between Cuba and the United States. I expressed my feeling that there are so many com-

[4] Substantive conversations were held with Isabel Hernandez Tapanes at the Hotel Nacional, Oct. 13 and 14, 1975.

plex issues with which to deal that the Puerto Rican issue certainly complicates matters. Although expressing my understanding of Cuba's traditional ties to Puerto Rico, and its support for revolutionary movements, I said that Cuba's intensification of support for Puerto Rican independence, at this particular time, through a major move in the United Nations, and through a much publicized international meeting in Havana in September, was negatively affecting what seemed to be the development of a warming trend in both the United States and Cuba toward the idea of relations. I told her that many Members of Congress were concerned about this particular issue and read her the statement of Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs William Rogers who just a few days earlier, expressed consternation over Cuba's Puerto Rican involvement at this particular time.

Ms. Hernandez' reaction to my comments revealed an important element which I believe has and will continue to have a significant bearing on relations between the United States and Cuba. She very clearly reflected the Cuban Government's position that Cuba's support of revolutionary movements, in this particular instance, independence for Puerto Rico, has nothing to do with relations with the United States. She reiterated that Cuba's interest in Puerto Rico was merely an implementation of its revolutionary principles and was in no way related to relations with the United States. She stated, to further explain this position, that Cuba supports the liberation of peoples living under colonialism in the French and British territories in the Caribbean but has close and cordial relations with France and Great Britain.

Subsequent discussion on this issue with members of the Cuban Mission to the United Nations [5] after my visit to Cuba, reenforced this position on revolutionary principles vis-a-vis relations with the United States. I discussed congressional reaction to the Puerto Rican issue, to the then recently revealed Cuban military involvement in Angola, and to the Cuban leadership on the anti-Zionist resolution in the United Nations General Assembly. The Cuban diplomats, on Puerto Rico, spoke in terms very similar to those used by Isabel Hernandez, and defended Cuban involvement in all three issues as fulfillment of Cuban revolutionary principles. They did not believe that these issues should play a role in the discussion of normalization of relations with the United States.

From these conversations, one might conclude that a major difficulty in the United States and Cuba coming to terms with one another, lies in what may be a conceptual variance which has developed over the past 16 years. The Cuban Government and the U.S. Government seem to be perceiving these problems on two distinct and separate levels. Many Members of Congress and policymakers in the Department of State clearly view Cuban involvement in Puerto Rico, Angola, and what many interpret as anti-United States stances in the United Nations and other international bodies, as matters which directly affect the question of future relations with Cuba. The Cubans, on the other hand, express consternation at this interpretation believing that these issues have nothing to do with the issue of bilateral relations with the United States. The Cubans feel strongly that the United States is going to have to recognize that it is dealing with a revolu-

[5] Discussions held Nov. 25, 1975, Washington, D.C.

tionary socialist government that will not change for the sake of relations. Whether or not the Cuban position as stated above is merely an official starting bargaining position, subject to later modification, a misreading of U.S. attitudes, or simply an ingenuous approach, the reconciliation of this conceptual dilemma could prove to be the most important issue in any future United States-Cuba dialogue.

## Trade

Substantive conversations on the prospects of trade between the United States and Cuba were held with Evelio Lastra Ramos at the Ministry of Foreign Trade, but only after a brief discourse on "el Bloqueo." The themes expressed by Lastra Ramos were similar to those conveyed by Isabel Hernandez and other Cuban officials to whom I spoke on the theme of relations with the United States. The foreign trade official said that Cuba would like to trade with the United States but at this point in time it was not an economic necessity. He contended that various commitments and trade relationships had developed over the past 16 years with the major trading nations of the world; they have done without the United States for this long. He said that if and when relations are resumed, the trade relationship between the two countries would develop very slowly because of these established economic and trade relationships that Cuba now exercises. Cuban needs are being fulfilled by other countries. Lastra Ramos pointed out that 40 percent of Cuba's trade is with non-Communist countries, listing Japan, Western European countries, and Canada as major trading partners. That 40 percent, according to Lastra, is larger than the total foreign trade picture before the Revolution. He said he realized that there were advantages to be gained by Cuban trade with the United States, mainly by virtue of geography. He agreed that the cost of rice, for example, would be much less if it could be imported from Louisiana, only a few hundred miles away, rather than from China and Australia, a journey of thousands of miles. Indeed, from our discussions, I feel that transportation savings would be a major factor in Cuban attitudes toward commerce with the United States.

I related to Lastra Ramos that I noticed in the Cuban press, the day before, that Vice Prime Minister Carlos Rafael Rodriguez was taking a delegation to Canada to discuss Canadian trade prospects in relation to the drafting of Cuba's 5-year economic plan. Noting that there was much discussion in the United States of trade with Cuba in the future, I asked if possible trade with the United States was also being factored into the 5-year plan. Lastra Ramos answered that it was not, but that he felt adjustments in the plan would be made if trade relations developed with the United States.

In relation to future trade between the United States and Cuba, I asked Lastra Ramos about the current availability of sugar to the U.S. market, realizing that most of the present sugar production is committed to the Soviet Union and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Lastra replied that the commitment to Japan is the largest to the capitalist countries and indicated that any sugar to the United States would principally come from the approximately 2.8 million tons now going to the capitalist nations. He said that the Cubans are

trying to increase the production of sugar, but that it would not be increased by that much.[6] He said, however, that the Cubans most likely would be willing to go to their major customers to free some of the committed sugar for the U.S. market if it developed. Lastra said that perhaps as much as 2.6 to 3 million tons might be made available for the U.S. market. However, there are other factors that come into play in Cuban interests in the U.S. sugar market, as demonstrated by Lastra's positive reaction to an assessment culled from various U.S. sources. He generally agreed that the sugar trade would be dependent on Cuban incentives to regain some of the former U.S. market, the relationship between the present world price and the price the Cubans might receive through bilateral arrangement with U.S. companies, transportation savings, and premiums U.S. companies might be willing to pay for the Cuban sugar.

We then discussed the possibilities of Cuban nickel for the U.S. market. Lastra commented that they are not interested in the United States as a market for Cuban nickel because of commitments to the Soviet Union and private companies in Europe. He said that 40,000 tons of nickel were produced per year and that by 1978–79, production would be doubled, so that 80,000 tons would be exported for sale without any problems. Cuba has commitments for its nickel production for at least 3 years, and Lastra Ramos felt that there would be no supply of nickel, in a major way, for the U.S. market for the next 5, 6, or 7 years. He also said that there would be a problem with the United States because of the nickel coming out of plants that were expropriated from U.S. firms.

With regard to those commodities the Cubans most wanted from the United States, Lastra Ramos placed agricultural products at the top of the priority list because they now pay great premiums for agricultural products shipped over long distances. In answer to my questions, he said that they were not interested in transportation equipment per se; they have enough cars and trucks for the economy as it stands today. He also said they are not interested in heavy construction equipment since they are doing very well with what they now have. At this time, they are not interested in computers, although he has read that U.S. computer companies are interested in coming in to Cuba. He said that they were, however, interested in sugar processing equipment.

The Cubans, as reflected by Lastra Ramos, are very well aware of the renewed interest in Cuba by the U.S. business community. However, the Cubans do not seem to be as excited by the prospect as are some of the U.S. companies, as reported in the U.S. business press, which is read regularly by the Ministry officials. For example, Lastra told me that they are not doing anything in particular to ready for the day when U.S. business might come in to Cuba. Contrary to some reports in the U.S. press, Cuba is not preparing market information or other aids of this type to be given to U.S. companies, according to Lastra Ramos.

Lastra expressed reservations about U.S. business' mentality with regard to Cuba. He felt that the companies still do not realize that they would be dealing with a socialist Cuba, not the Cuba of 1956 and

[6] Fidel Castro in December 1975, in his speech to the First Party Congress, announced that the Cubans would attempt to increase sugar production to 8 million tons in 1976.

1957. He felt that the companies have not grasped or do not realize what Cuba is today. That Cuba is no longer a consumer-oriented society; that in their socialist system, there would not be a great market for many of the goods the U.S. companies think they can sell to Cuba.

He said that Cuba, in the event of relations with the United States, would be prepared to deal with U.S. business as it now deals with business from capitalist countries. They now have what we would term joint ventures in participation and promotion. He made a special point to say there would be no ownership of land or ownership of other property by the businesses that operate in Cuba. Foreign companies would not operate independently within Cuba and there would be much participation by the Government; the Cuban Government considers itself a partner in any such investment venture. Under these terms, he was not sure how much interest there would be in Cuba by U.S. enterprise.

With preface that he felt that our talk was important in considering the future relationship between the United States and Cuba, Lastra offered a summary of his views on the prospects of trade between the two countries as a parting note. He reiterated that Cuba is interested in trade with the United States but is not desperate for it, since it has done these many years without it by trading with all the major nations of the world. Again expressing his reservations regarding the attitudes of U.S. business toward Cuba, he stressed that when and if the day comes when our two countries resume relations, trade would begin very slowly and would take a number of years to develop into a significant economic relationship.

Speaking in terms of future trade prospects, Lastra Ramos said that by necessity, Cuba would need MFN status if it would carry on a trade relationship with the United States. He said that the attainment of MFN status would be another issue but that he did not see it hindering or stopping the trade process dead in its tracks.

The Foreign Trade Ministry officials were quite knowledgeable about economic conditions in the United States and gave indications that their understanding of these conditions played an important role in their thinking toward the prospects of trade with the United States.

## Other Major Issues

In my conversations with Isabel Hernandez, I attempted to cover other issues which are important to congressional consideration of the question of normalization of relations with Cuba. The following is a summation of our conversations with regard to them.

### Cuba's relationship to the Soviet Union

I noted that it was recognized in the United States that Cuba was dependent on the Soviet Union, economically and militarily, and therefore posed a question regarding the diminishment of Soviet influence in the event of renewed relations with the United States. Ms. Hernandez said that a lessening of Soviet influence was not likely because the two countries are closely related through a series of agreements and commitments, which continue for years in the future. She said that the U.S. relationship with Cuba would be part of the new economic and political picture and would be considered in the general frame-

work of relations with all countries. Isabel Hernandez' answer, considered along with Lastra Ramos' comments on the slow development of United States-Cuba trade, leads to the conclusion that there really would not be much of a diminishment of Soviet economic influence in Cuba, especially in the first few years of relationship with the United States.

Militarily, Isabel Hernandez said that Soviet presence has been lowered already. She said that for a time earlier in the history of the Revolution, around the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Missile Crisis, the Cubans feared attack from the United States and received protection from the Soviet military. Now, she said, the international climate is more stable and there no longer is the need for extensive Soviet support, and therefore, the Soviet military presence has been reduced.

She contended that the naval facility at Cienfuegos Bay was not a Russian naval base, as reported by some U.S. sources, but was an industrial complex and a large sugar terminal. There are naval facilities with docking and refueling capabilities but she said there are no Russians in the area and that her comments on the Cienfuegos Bay area were based on a visit she made there in April 1975, as she hosted an African prime minister through Cuba.

### GUANTANAMO

Isabel Hernandez' low-key comments on the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo indicated that while the issue is very important to the Cubans it is not viewed as an insurmountable obstacle to relations as is, for instance, the embargo. She, however, never wavered on the point, which has always been part of Cuban thought since the Revolution, that Guantanamo is part of Cuban national territory and that the Cubans are not willing to discuss "conditions" with regard to the area. The "conditions" to which she referred were in reaction to a scenario which I played for her in which the United States gives up Guantanamo for a reduced Soviet military presence, especially naval forces in the Cienfuegos Bay area. Aside from her statement on "conditions" she reiterated that the Soviet military presence already had been reduced and that Cienfuegos is not a Russian naval facility.

Ms. Hernandez spoke as if there was no question that the end result of discussions with the United States over the Guantanamo area would result in its reversion back to Cuba. She felt that a very logical result of discussions with the United States would see the facilities at Guantanamo, as well as those in Cienfuegos, be made available for repair and refueling of ships from the United States as well as other nations.

### CLAIMS AND COMPENSATION

On the claims and compensation issue, I asked Ms. Hernandez about the validity of reports in the U.S. press that Cuba was preparing a "counterclaim" to the U.S. claim of approximately $1.8 billion (now estimated to be $3.4 billion to offset inflation), in U.S.-owned property confiscated by the Cuban Government. One source said that Cuba was expected to demand payment of damages caused by the embargo and other adverse acts amounting to four times the U.S. claim, which could mean a Cuban counterclaim of $13.6 billion. Without indicating di-

rectly whether a counterclaim was being prepared by the Government, Ms. Hernandez said that it was very difficult to put in dollar terms what the Cubans feel is owed by the United States. She said Cuban grievances involved many intangibles and proceeded to list some of them beginning with U.S. intervention in the Cuban fight against Spain for independence and ending with the cost of human life at the Bay of Pigs. I deduce from our discussion that the Cubans are thinking about a counterclaim but that the specifics are not yet formulated.

### POLITICAL PRISONERS

Isabel Hernandez recognized that the political prisoner issue would be an important one for discussion but did not feel that it would be that great a problem to resolve. In our discussion, I emphasized the importance of this issue to many Members of Congress, making the point that this particular issue, unlike some of the others, transcended political and ideological lines and was seriously considered by liberals and conservatives alike.

I discussed the political prisoner issue in more depth with Dr. Mario Ugidos,[7] a justice of the Popular Tribunal, Cuba's Supreme Court. The Cubans seem to have a very good feel for the significance of the political prisoner issue to the United States, although Dr. Ugidos qualified his remarks by saying that the subject matter *per se* was out of his jurisdiction since he sits on the crime sector of the court. However, he was familiar enough with the situation to provide some comment and insight into Cuban official thinking on the matter. Without getting specific as to numbers, he thought that the estimate of 20,000 to 50,000 political prisoners (the "moderate" count given in U.S. sources) was greatly exaggerated. Dr. Ugidos felt that most of those who are termed political prisoners have been rehabilitated and have returned to Cuban society. Those remaining in prison, according to Dr. Ugidos are "hard line Batistianos" who are buoyed up by reports they receive from their exile supporters that the Castro Government is in trouble and one day will be toppled. Ugidos felt that this hope has given this group of prisoners the strength to resist rehabilitation programs and eventual freedom.

In answer to my question as to why the Cubans would not allow international inspection of their prisons and meetings with political prisoners, Pedro Llopis answered that the Cuban Government would never lower itself to the level of the anti-Cuban propaganda regarding the political prisoner issue. He said the same principle is working in this situation as was working after the missile crisis when Fidel Castro refused to allow inspection of Cuba for missiles that might be remaining.

### POSTSCRIPT

This report, necessarily limited, because of the original scope of the study visit and the unscheduled automobile accident, merely skims the surface of the issues considered. The congressional role in the possible change of U.S. policy toward Cuba will be substantial because of the great body of legislation which deals with relations between the two nations.

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[7] Dinner meeting at Hotel Nacional, Oct. 10, 1975.

# APPENDIX

## Itinerary

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|---|---|---|
| September 18: | 8 a.m. | Depart Washington National Airport. |
| September 19: | 2 a.m. | Arrive Havana, Jose Marti Airport. |
| | 9 a.m. | Meeting with Blaise Schenk, Chargé d'Affairs, Embassy of Switzerland. |
| | 3 p.m. | Arrive Hotel Nacional de Cuba, meeting with Mary Gentile and Pedro Llopis, MINREX. |
| | 8:30 p.m. | Dinner with Mary Gentile and Pedro Llopis. |
| September 20: | Morning | Free time. |
| | 1:30 p.m. | Meeting with Esteban Morales, Dean of Humanities, University of Havana. |
| | 4 p.m. | Lunch with Esteban Morales and Mary Gentile. |
| | Evening | Free time. |
| September 21: | 12 noon | Veradero Beach, Matanzas Province. |
| September 22: | Afternoon | Havana, free time. |
| | 7 p.m. | Dinner with Mary Gentile. |
| | 9 p.m. | Meeting with University Group on the United States, University of Havana. |
| September 23: | 8:30 a.m. | Visit to Alamar Housing Project. |
| | 3 p.m. | Meeting with Director, Office of Information, Ministry of Education. |
| | Evening | Free time. |
| September 24: | 10 a.m. | Meeting with Evelio Lastra Ramos, Chief of the North American Department, Directorate for Western Europe and North America, Ministry of Foreign Trade. |
| | 2:30 p.m. | Accident on road to Matanzas at Canaci (en route to meeting with representatives of Poder Popular). |
| | 3:30 p.m. | Admitted to Hospital Provincial de Matanzas. |
| September 24–October 6: | | Hospitalized in Matanzas. |
| September 26: | 3 p.m. | Meeting with Mariano de la Red, member Executive Committee and Director of Foreign Relations, Poder Popular, in Hospital. |
| October 6: | 2 p.m. | Return to Hotel Nacional, Havana. |
| October 7: | 3 p.m. | Meeting with Blaise Schenk in Hotel. |
| October 8: | 3 p.m. | Meeting with Members of University Study Group in Hotel. |
| October 9: | 2 p.m. | Film showing at the Cuban Institute of the Motion Picture Arts and Industry (ICAIC). |
| October 10: | 9 a.m. | Tour of Havana. |
| | 2 p.m. | Meeting with Blaise Schenk. |
| | 8:30 p.m. | Dinner meeting with Dr. Mario Ugidos, Justice, Popular Tribunal. |
| October 11: | Afternoon | Tour of Havana Province (Alamar, Cojimar). |

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ITINERARY—Continued

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|---|---|---|
| October 12: | 8:30 a.m. | Tour of Las Valles de Picadura meeting with Ramon Castro Ruz. |
| | Evening | Dinner at residence of Mr. and Mrs. Blaise Schenk. |
| October 13: | 10 a.m. | Meeting with Isabel Hernandez Tapanes, Director of North American and Caribbean Section, MINREX. |
| | 1:30 p.m. | Luncheon meeting with Alberto Betancourt, President, Chamber of Commerce. |
| October 14: | 9 a.m. | Visit to Fishing Port, Havana. |
| | 12 noon | Luncheon meeting with Isabel Hernandez Tapanes. |
| | 7 p.m. | Meeting with Middle Eastern analyst from MINREX. |
| | 9 p.m. | Dinner meeting with Esteban Morales. |
| October 15: | 7:30 a.m. | Depart Havana. |
| | 7 p.m. | Arrive Washington National Airport. |

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